

THE STORY OF TWO WORKING GIRLS AND THE HARDEST WAY WOMAN EVER TROD

By Jane Whitaker.

I am going to quote you a statement made by John T. Richards, president of the Chicago Bar association and member of the Illinois commission on marriage and divorce.

"The White Slave body is furnishing excuses for delinquency on the part of the working girls," he said. "A girl drawing poor wages now feels that she is justified by the state of Illinois in following the so-called 'easiest way.'"

That "easiest way" phrase was originated by the author of a play who has a girl choose to adopt a life of shame when she is unable to get work and is against starvation, and again decide to follow it when the man she loves laughs at her threat to commit suicide and tell her she is too great a coward.

I want to tell you just a simple story of a girl who took the "easiest way." I am not trying to place the responsibility anywhere—I just want

to show Mr. Richards, president of the Chicago Bar Association, that the justification of the State of Illinois, or of the United States of America doesn't weigh one iota in the scale of delinquency. Either it is due to a psychological factor that some day some scientist will give us the key to, as Lombroso and others of his kind have given us the key to criminology—or it is that little proverb, "Necessity knows no law," and so far the weight of evidence is in favor of the latter.

Two sisters, orphans, lived together and worked in a department store. The younger of the two earned four dollars, and the older sister \$8. They managed to exist, though it wasn't an existence than many would envy. They had a little room which opened on a court and was as dark in the day as at night—still that didn't trouble them, they were only home on Sunday and used a kerosene lamp then. For this room they paid \$1.50. Their breakfasts were always the same—a pint bottle of milk, shared, and five cents worth of rolls, butterless.

Elsie, the younger, had never been very strong, but she contracted a cold early in the winter, and it clung to her, in her half-starved, half-clad condition.

She began to stay away from the store and lie all day in that darkened, unsanitary room, and the burden rested more heavily on Madge. Finally Elsie stopped working altogether. The doctor said it was consumption, and of the rapid type.

I could tell you a terrible story of what hardships the girls had endured during this time—the food they lived on, the ways they saved and hoarded, but it wasn't any use. One girl cannot really LIVE on \$8; then how can two?

There was no one to go to for aid. Madge had already applied to one of the most widely known institutions and they had replied that they would send an investigator, and had let the matter rest there.

She tried to get the doctor's prescription filled at a Free Dispensary, and the Free Dispensary decided that as she was earning \$8 a week she did not come under the head of a person unable to pay.

They got in arrears for the rent; the doctor was becoming impatient for money, and he seemed to regard Elsie in that room as a foolish case to treat—she didn't have a show on God's earth, anyway.

During one whole sleepless night Madge thought the problem out.